

Vanderbilt University wins governor's pollution prevention award; MTA Free Ride to Work program anchors environmental efforts

NASHVILLE, Tenn. – The state of Tennessee has recognized Vanderbilt University for its leadership and innovation in protecting the environment with the 2006 Governor's Environmental Stewardship Award in Pollution Prevention.

The keynote program for Vanderbilt's winning entry was its Free Ride to Work Program that provides bus fare to and from work on MTA buses for faculty and staff.

Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation officials called the process the most competitive in the 20-year history of the awards program.

Michael Schoenfeld, vice chancellor for public affairs, will accept the award on Vanderbilt's behalf during a 1:30 p.m. ceremony Friday, June 23, at the Adventure Science Center.

"We are pleased and proud to be recognized with this award," Chancellor Gordon Gee said. "As an institution committed to education, discovery and science, we have to be leaders in environmental stewardship, not simply followers. I am particularly grateful to our staff, faculty and students who have worked together on this critical issue."

Vanderbilt also was a finalist in the Green Schools – Higher Education category for its effort to achieve Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design certification on each of the five new facilities being constructed for the new Freshman Commons on the Peabody College campus. The LEED certification means buildings are designed to benefit both the environment and the buildings' inhabitants.

Andrea George, associate director of the Vanderbilt Environmental Health and Safety Department, coordinated several aspects of Vanderbilt's environmental efforts into a cohesive presentation to TDEC. The chairman of the Clean Air Partnership of Middle Tennessee, a regional air quality alert program that includes VEHS, nominated Vanderbilt for its Best Workplaces for Commuters designation by the Environmental Protection Agency and U.S. Department of Transportation.

"I think it's a wonderful recognition of a lot of innovative programs that have been implemented by Vanderbilt over the past couple of years," George said.

The Environmental Protection Agency and Department of Transportation last fall added Vanderbilt to a list of Best Workplaces for Commuters in recognition of its efforts to reduce

pollution, commuting costs, traffic congestion and employee stress. Vanderbilt is the largest private employer in Middle Tennessee with nearly 20,000 faculty and staff.

In addition to the MTA Free Ride to Work Program, two Vanderbilt University Medical Center parking garages use FlexPool to reduce parking fees for employees who agree to carpool. The university also provides bicycle racks throughout the campus and shower facilities for those who bike to work, and supports flexible work schedules and telecommuting when possible through the Alternative Work Arrangements policy.

The Vanderbilt Valet program at VUMC assists employees with daily errands so that doctors and staff can remain at work while their personal needs are taken care of free of charge. Various eateries provided by Dining Services also keep students on campus and out of their cars, adding to the commuter benefits and reducing pollution.

All of these programs in conjunction with the MTA Free Ride to Work program added up to the first-place designation from TDEC.

"The award is really highlighting programs that are win-win for a lot of reasons. These programs have multiple benefits for our entire campus community as well as the greater Middle Tennessee community," said George. "I see this as a public pronouncement of all the great work that's being done here."

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